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How does Work Engagement Affect Psychosocial Safety Climate and Burnout? The Case of the Malaysian Research Universities

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Research Highlights

This study proposes an excellent job design by Psychosocial Safety Climate (PSC) via different types of job demands which could improve the work engagement of Malaysian research universities academicians while diminishing their burnout level. Hence, work engagement is proposed in this study as a promising mediator for the relationship between challenge demands and hindrance demands to burnout among respective academicians. In general, the comprehensive PSC context suggested for the remunerative job demands while minimizing the level of burnout of academicians through work engagement as the mediation pathway. Ergo, PSC is valuable as a tool in helping the enhancement of management practices of research universities and consecutively the health and well-being of academicians.

Research Objectives

The psychological health and well-being of academicians are of central concern to the Malaysian research universities. In this paper, we observe the burnout among academicians in theory and practice. We begin by examining the relationship between PSC and burnout. Next, the relationship between PSC and work engagement is also examined. In addition, we intend to examine the relationship between PSC and job demands (challenge demands and hindrance demands). We also examine the relationship between job demands (challenge demands and hindrance demands) and burnout. Furthermore, examination is done on the relationship between job demands (challenge demands and hindrance demands) and work engagement. The relationship between work engagement and burnout is also examined. Lastly, we suggest that work engagement mediates the relationship between job demands and burnout. The significance of this study promote for the participation and commitment from the management of research university, policy-maker, and also the academicians to practise PSC together into the real workforce setting. As a consequence, the appropriate job design based on the relevant job demands can be cultivated for the academicians. Hence, the burnout level among the research university academicians is decreased while their well-being and health are emphasized by the respective university.





Methodology

During the review on burnout, the area of study is confined to education, specifically on burnout among Malaysian research university academicians. Only full-time academicians with at least one year of working experience in Universiti Malaya, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Universiti Sains Malaysia, and Universiti Teknologi Malaysia are included in this study. Previous studies demonstrated that socialization process will need at least six months to take place at the workplace (Filstad, 2004; Katz, 1978; Morrison, 1993; Van Maanen, 1975). Also, it is believed that academicians may not experience burnout in the first year or beginning of their working routine. Meanwhile, the research university academicians who are on medical, maternity, sabbatical or study leave during the study as well as tutors and trainee lecturers are excluded from this study. Astonishingly, different types of job demands are found to be the primary contributor of burnout which in turn to low work engagement among the academicians. Hence, PSC is recognized as the solution for a promising job design, which elevating challenge demands while diminishing the implications of hindrance demands. The literature review is then extended to identify if work engagement could boost the positive influence of job demands on burnout of academicians.

Results

Based on the review of literature, it is found that PSC, which behaves as a specific climate for psychological well-being in the workplace, is related with a few features of psychological health, such as anger, burnout, and depression (Dollar & Bakker, 2010). It is also exhibited that work engagement can be fostered by PSC through reducing exposure to workplace psychological dangers, which include overbearing and harassment (Law, Dollard, Tuckey & Dormann, 2011). Meanwhile, PSC is indicated for its ability to reduce the impact of job demands at work, which trigger the unpleasant work outcomes (Idris, Dollard, Coward & Dormann, 2012). Prior studies have shown that both challenge and hindrance demands were proportionately associated to burnout (Yulita, Idris & Dollard, 2014), particularly when an employee is unable to cope with the job demands within the imposed time. However, work engagement is found to be positively related to challenge demands (Crawford, LePine & Rich, 2010), but negatively related to hindrance demands (Van den Broeck, De Cuyper, De Witte & Vansteenkiste, 2010). Lastly, Hultell and Gustavsson (2010) pointed that work





engagement possesses a negative relationship with burnout, where an individual tends to experience less burnout if he is highly engaged to his work.

Findings

Based on the discussion above, it is found that challenge job demands are positively related to work engagement while hindrance job demands are negatively related to work engagement. Furthermore, it is also realized that work engagement is inversely related to burnout of the employees. Hence, this study proposes that work engagement is the potential mediator for the relationship between both challenge and hindrance job demands to burnout level of the worker since there are significant relationships from challenge and hindrance demands to work engagement and from work engagement to burnout.

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